Universities UK International

Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade

Fostering bilateral and multilateral research ecosystems in Engineering Biology pump priming scheme

Guidelines

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS: 25 November 2026

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1. Background and overview of the scheme

This programme is funded through the UK Government's International Science Partnerships Fund (ISPF). ISPF is the UK Government's flagship fund for international science, technology, research and innovation. By bringing together expertise from the UK and around the world, the Fund supports collaboration on shared priorities, strengthens research and innovation capability, and develops the ideas, technologies and solutions needed for a more prosperous, secure and sustainable future. Universities UK International (UUKi), an operating unit of Universities UK (UUK), is launching a **pump-priming scheme** under the programme, **'Fostering bilateral and multilateral research ecosystems in Engineering Biology'**.

This programme of competitive grants is available exclusively to UUK member institutions and UUKi subscribers to use in the context of research and innovation partnerships with either **Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands or Sweden**. We welcome creative applications from institutions for activities that support the development of new, recently established or dormant partnerships between the UK and one of the above countries as they relate to research and innovation in engineering biology, with a goal of developing and submitting a Horizon Europe application building on their grant idea for the first time. Priority will be given to engineering biology projects with cross-cutting capabilities with a particular focus on Horizon Europe pillar 2 cluster areas in Health (cluster 1), Digital, Industry and Space (cluster 4), Climate, Energy and Mobility (cluster 5) and Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment (cluster 6), as underpinned in the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy priorities.

The programme also comprises a researcher mobility scheme expected to launch in 2027 and an annual multilateral networking event. While these activities are not part of the current pump priming call, they are designed to provide follow-on opportunities for partnerships established through this scheme and support the development of sustainable international engineering biology partnerships.

2. Objectives and aims of the scheme

Successful institutions will be expected to demonstrate how the targeted activities will support or enable researchers to develop collaborative activity between the UK and specified countries, with a goal of working towards submission of a Horizon Europe application and/or other international funding opportunities, building on their grant idea when a relevant call opens. Applications from Lead Researchers who have previously not received any Horizon Europe (or predecessor) funding are particularly encouraged.

Project activity could include:

- feasibility studies
- project development workshops
- application advice and training
- partnership building
- resource to develop an application for Horizon Europe participation and/or other international funding

In line with UUK's charitable objectives, the primary beneficiaries of the funding programme must be UK higher education institutions.

The outcomes that this call will deliver include:

- UK universities will have resources to build long-term strategic partnerships that support both institutional and UK-wide research and innovation priorities.
- Shared resources and capabilities that will better position UK universities to participate in Horizon Europe, and particularly within the areas of:
    - Health
    - Digital, Industry and Space
    - Climate, Energy and Mobility
    - Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment
- Partnerships between the UK and either Danish, German, Dutch or Swedish research ecosystems that advance existing, and develop new, research and innovation collaborations, with a particular focus on Horizon Europe
- Applicants who have never received EU Framework Programme funding will be supported to develop Horizon Europe applications, including Early Career Researchers.

3. Eligibility

The **Fostering bilateral and multilateral research ecosystems in Engineering Biology pump-priming scheme** is open to all UK HEIs that are UUK members and UUKi subscribers (Our members), and eligible to receive grant funding from one of the UK higher education funding bodies (such as UK Research and Innovation). It is expected that the Lead Applicant from the UK HEI will lead the relationship with the partner in either Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands or Sweden.

Completed application forms must be submitted **online on our grant management platform** by a designated Lead Applicant from a UK HEI. Before submitting the application, the Lead Applicant must have identified an appropriate senior representative of the institution to authorise their application in accordance with their institution's internal approval processes. A senior representative might constitute a head of department, school or faculty. They must be named in the application. Following submission, this individual will be notified and asked to confirm whether the application has received the necessary institutional approval. They must approve the application before the application deadline.

To be eligible to apply the Lead Applicant must:

- be a researcher
- hold a PhD or equivalent qualification
- be a permanent employee or treated as one throughout the proposed research project
- be employed at an institution which receives grant funding from one of the UK higher education funding bodies, such as UKRI
- be a resident of the UK at the point of application
- devote a set amount of their working hours to delivering this project

- be proposing to establish either a new partnership, or nurture a recently established or dormant partnership with academic institutions, organisations or companies in either Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands or Sweden
- confirm that the proposal has been discussed with their counterparts
- have identified a Horizon Europe cluster or call they would like to apply to

4. Available funding

The total amount of funding available for the **Fostering bilateral and multilateral research ecosystems in Engineering Biology pump-priming scheme** is **£600,000**. Proposals should be for **up to £20,000**; however, applicants should think carefully about their ability to spend all awarded funds and carry out funded activities by 15 March 2027. UUKi expects to make around 30 awards altogether, but this is highly dependent on the number of applications and the amount of funding requested. Applications are welcome from all eligible institutions. There is no limit to the number of researchers or research related staff that can be included in an application for the scheme, nor is there a limit on the number of applications an institution can submit, but in the instance of multiple applications, they would need to be distinct projects/partnerships. UUKi will however be looking to award a diverse range of institution types/models as part of this scheme so institutions are expected to prioritise applications that are most closely aligned to the call's objectives.

Funding will be provided in a single transfer within 90 days upon receipt of an invoice following acceptance of final budget and report. Final budget and report will need to be submitted by 15 March 2027.

5. Eligible costs and profile of spend

The expectation is that this funding will be utilised in a variety of ways. Supported pump-priming activities for this call could include, but are not limited to:

- **Research/Feasibility studies aligning with Horizon Europe** (due to the short timeframe by which projects need to be completed, such studies cannot involve lengthy processes for orders and/or approval)
- **Partnership development** (e.g. partnership development workshops, stakeholder meetings, public engagement events)
- **Resource/capacity building** (e.g. sustainability-themed hackathon or innovation challenge for researchers to generate ideas for future projects aligning with a Horizon Europe application, application advice and training etc.)

Eligible funding:

1. Costs for concept or proof of market work and proposal development
2. Costs of meetings for the organisations involved in the UK or eligible partner country to prepare the Horizon Europe proposal
3. Travel and subsistence in line with institutional policies
4. Salary costs for temporary research and/or clerical assistance (based in the UK)
5. Due diligence work on partners
6. Contributions towards support services such as proposal writing

Ineligible funding:

The following items are not eligible for funding:

1. Institutional overheads, or any element that should properly be ascribed to institutional overheads
2. Salaries for the Lead Applicant or other permanent members of staff
3. Purchasing of assets
4. Computer hardware including laptops, electronic notebooks, digital cameras, etc.
5. Books and other permanent resources
6. Subventions for direct production costs (printing, binding, distribution, marketing etc.)
7. Costs of publication in electronic media
8. Travel and maintenance expenses for purposes such as lecture tours or to write up the results of research
9. Carbon offsetting
10. Consumables such as laboratory supplies

All grants will be paid to the employing institution of the Lead Applicant, and not to the individual researchers involved.

6. Terms of application

- This guidelines document is not an agreement and is neither an offer nor invitation of offer by UUKi to the prospective applicants or any other person.
- The purpose of these guidelines is to provide interested parties with information to assist in the formulation of their application.
- Applications that are not duly authorised and /or not received by the specified deadline will not be accepted.
- UUKi will notify both the Lead applicant and administrative contact where the UK HEI has been provisionally selected for funding (subject to agreeing to Terms and Conditions).
- UUKi reserves the right to publish the names of selected UK HEIs. By making an application to the scheme you are giving your consent for your details to be published in this way, provided your application is successful.
- Offers of awards (including Terms and Conditions) are subject to UK local law and practices and are subject to change by UUKi.

- UUKi may in its absolute discretion, but without being under any obligation to do so, update, amend, or supplement the information, assessment or assumptions contained in these guidelines.
- Due to the volume of applications expected, UUKi will not provide feedback on individual applications.

7. Data Protection

- UUKi will use information provided in the application solely for the purposes of processing the application, making any consequential award, for the payment, monitoring, and review of the Award. As part of the assessment process, application information may be shared with external reviewers and members of the Selection Committee for the purposes of peer review and selection.
- UUKi shall share any necessary data on the application with the UK Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (BIST) for reporting purposes.

8. Research Security and Export Controls

Applicants are responsible for ensuring compliance with all applicable legislation, regulatory requirements and institutional policies relevant to the proposed activity. This includes engagement with relevant processes at your university to ensure due diligence is undertaken and risk mitigations have been put in place.

Applicants should consider whether their project involves:

- Transfers of export-controlled data, technology, know-how or biological resources to partners outside of the UK
- Research in the 17 sensitive areas of the economy under the National Security and Investment Act
- Recruiting or moving researchers or postgraduate research students into a role in a technology-related field requiring an Academic Technology Approval Scheme certificate
- Arrangements under which you may be at direction of a foreign power, as defined by the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme
- Other sensitive or dual-use research

Applicants are encouraged to review:

- UK strategic export controls - GOV.UK
- National Security and Investment Act guidance
- Academic Technology Approval Scheme guidance
- Foreign Influence Registration Scheme guidance
- NPSA Trusted Research campaign
- UUK guidance on managing risks in international research and innovation

For further information, applicants should seek guidance from your university research office. As part of the application process, applicants will also be required to confirm that they have followed their institution's relevant research security policies, procedures and approval processes prior to submission.

9. How to apply

- The deadline for applications is **25 November 2026 at 5pm (GMT)**

All applications must be submitted via our grant management platform, Good Grants. To get set up on Good Grants, please follow the link here.

Frequently Asked Questions have been compiled and added to the call webpage. Answers to any subsequent questions will be added to the FAQs page.

10. Evaluation criteria

Please refer to detailed criteria for applications in the call document 'Selection Criteria' on the call webpage. As stated in the 'Selection Criteria' document, applications will be scored out of 20 in total with each of the following criteria being scored out of 5 and equally weighted:

- Strategic partnership fit
- Project fit
- Deliverability in the time available
- Alignment with Horizon Europe priorities

All applications will be subject to an eligibility check undertaken by appropriate UUKi staff before being put forward for assessment by a pool of peer reviewers. Applications that are not completed correctly or received by the deadline will not be considered. All reviewed proposals submitted in response to this call will be assessed by an independent Selection Committee. The decision of the Selection Committee is final and confidential. No appeals will be considered. UUKi is unable to enter into any communication on the Selection Committee's decisions.

11. Timeline

Call opens	28 October 2026
Call closes	25 November 2026, at 5pm GMT
Review and selection process	26 November to 18 December 2026
Institutions notified of outcome	w/c 21 December 2026
Project start date upon signing Offer of Award letter	January 2027
Interim report	15 February 2027
Project end date	15 March 2027

End of project report	15 March 2027
Follow up reports	• 6 months post project closure, no later than 15 September 2027 • 12 months post project closure, no later than 15 March 2028

12. Key call documents

The following key call documents can be found on the call webpage, including links to set up your account on our grant management platform: Fostering bilateral and multilateral research ecosystems in engineering biology pump-priming scheme

- Call guidelines
- Selection criteria
- Budget spreadsheet
- FAQs

As part of the application form Lead Applicants will be asked to confirm that they have read, understood and agree with the call guidelines and selection criteria.

13. About Universities UK International (UUKi)

Universities UK International (UUKi) is the international arm of Universities UK, representing UK universities and acting in their collective interests globally. We actively promote universities abroad, provide trusted information for and about them, and create new opportunities for the sector.

14. Contact

If you have any questions, please contact the UUKi Strategic Partnerships Team:

Universities UK International
Woburn House
20 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9HQ

Universities UK International

Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade

Email: uk-grants-eb@international.ac.uk

15. Applicant Eligibility checklist

Good Grants account is set up for PI and shared with institutional sign-off contact	
The application form is completed in full and complies with instructions given	
The budget spreadsheet has been uploaded as part of the submission of the online application form	
All the necessary institutional approvals to submit the application on behalf of applying UK HEI and partner organisation have been obtained	
The institution applying is a UK HEI that receives grant funding from one of the UK higher education funding bodies	
Lead applicants submitting this application are employed by the Lead UK HEI and are resident in the UK at the point of application	
The partner organisation is an existing or new partner of the applying UK HEI and is aware of this proposal	
The institution has identified a Horizon Europe cluster or call they would like to apply to	